

INDRAJIT BANERJEE

## **Cultural Industries and Cultural Dynamics in Malaysia: Critical Problems of Content in the Age of Infrastructure**

### **Introduction**

The diverse streams of communications media and technology are "commingling" in the ocean of convergence. The advent of information technology offers new and potent means and conduits for cultural production and dissemination. Global cultural flows are increasing at an unprecedented rate as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are going to accelerate further with the creation of information infrastructure and superhighways across the world.

The potential impact of information technology on the cultural sphere of nations and communities is just beginning to be examined. However, there has been a clear absence of debate and discussion on the cultural implications of convergence. In Asia, where even with the mass media there has been a progressive decline of national cultural production and a greater importation of foreign cultural commodities, there is increasing stress on the creation of information infrastructures without any concern for content.

This paper will examine the cultural dynamics of the media, cultural industries as well as IT in Asia, with specific focus on the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) initiative. It will highlight the discrepancies between infrastructure and content in the Malaysian IT initiative and argue that there is a clear shift in terms of cultural policy with respect to IT. The process of liberalization has not only affected communications technology but has also profoundly altered the sphere of cultural production. Malaysian and other Asian

IT initiatives reflect the abandoning of the cultural sphere by national governments to market forces.

Without falling into a simplistic "cultural imperialism" perspective, this paper will argue that countries all over the world have been gripped by a "no way out" and "let's make money" syndrome. This emerging trend can have highly damaging effects on the capacity of nations to give cultural production and content the place that it rightfully deserves in the creation of information infrastructure. Strange as it may seem, although IT offers tremendous opportunities to increase national and local content creation, governments and cultural institutions seem to have given up the cultural battle in the race to the information age. Cultural conduits in the form of broadband high-speed information networks are being created all over Asia just so that content from external sources can gush in and flood the cultural landscape.

#### **Globalization and World Trade in Cultural Commodities: Imbalances and Concentration**

The topic of media globalization and its cultural implications has been a major focus of debate and discussion in media and cultural studies. A variety of approaches, theories and positions have been presented and debated. In the developing world, where cultural concerns were considered to be crucial to national unity and development, there has been a wide spectrum of theoretical and ideological positions in the debate on cultural implications of media globalization. Beginning with development communication and an optimistic approach to Western values and media and going to dependency critiques and cultural imperialism perspectives, developing countries have struggled to comprehend the real implications of transnational cultural flows on national and local cultural development (Banerjee, 1999).

Recent micro-social analyses have revealed that cultural processes are complex and that the implications of cultural interaction can be best understood as an articulation between local, national and transcultural or global cultural forces and factors (Dowmunt, 1993; Sahin and Aksoy, 1993; Mohammadi, 1990). Globalization and localization are then the two extreme poles in a whole range of dynamic cultural processes and it is therefore perhaps better to conceptualize the cultural

landscape today as a process of what some thinkers have termed "glocalization" (Friedman, 1990; Robertson, 1995).

It is no longer possible to conceive of culture as a singular entity. The house of culture has many floors and individuals all over the world are being forced to shift between these various cultural spaces. Cultural boundaries are blurred and we are living in a time of complex cultural constructions which give rise to contradictions of identity and consciousness (Featherstone, 1990). This essentially renders almost impossible the task of tracing the cultural scapes that characterize the world today.

Whatever be the complexities of the cultural scenario, one clear fact is that there are great imbalances in global cultural flows and in world trade in cultural commodities. America has emerged as the most powerful content provider and dominates clearly the world's cultural industries. In every country in the world, American television programs and films adorn the screens. Whether it be in the remote villages in India or in the kampungs of Malaysia, American cultural icons and content make their overbearing presence felt.

This imbalance is particularly striking when one considers the fact that world trade in cultural commodities almost tripled between 1980 and 1991, from \$67 billion to \$200 billion (UNDP, 1999). What it signifies is that while trade in cultural commodities is increasing at an astonishing pace, only a few countries are benefiting from this trade. In the United States, for example, the largest single export industry is not aircraft, computers or automobiles, but entertainment. Hollywood films grossed more than \$30 billion worldwide in 1997. Another significant fact is that a large share of these revenues are generated not in America but in foreign markets – Hollywood draws more than 50% of its revenues from overseas markets, up from just 30% in 1980 (UNDP, 1999).

The global market for cultural products such as literature, music, cinema, television and books is getting increasingly concentrated. While global trade in the sector is generating unprecedented revenues, around the world, there is a systematic decline of national cultural industries. Hollywood films claimed 70% of the film market in Europe in 1996, up from 56% in 1987 – and 83% in Latin America and 50% in Japan. Countries such as Mexico which once produced over a 100 films every year witnessed a rapid decline in film

production to less than 40 films by 1995 and down to only about 10 films by 1998 (UNDP, 1999).

The concentration in the global market and trade in cultural commodities is taking on a new and even more dangerous shape and magnitude with the ongoing process of corporate convergence. As the euphoria of the new millennium began to settle down and when people all over the world started to recover from their Y2K "end of the world" nightmares, corporate America stunned the information technology sector with the news of yet another mega-merger. In early January 2000, America Online announced its acquisition of none other than Time Warner for a whopping sum of \$160 billion.

With this acquisition, the world's largest media company has been created. The new company, AOL-Time Warner, will have more than 100 million paying subscribers to their various services. They will have a combined workforce of more than 80,000 people. Annual sales figures of the new company's products and services are being projected at \$140 billion. Market capitalization stands at approximately \$350 billion (<http://news.cnet.com/>, January 10, 2000).

This merger signals several emerging trends in the information and communication industries, most notably the acquisition by large capitalized Internet firms of some of the world's most powerful media companies. In the past decades convergence was generally restricted to inter-sector mergers and acquisitions where large entertainment and media corporations acquired other companies to constitute vertically integrated and global media giants. Today, we are witnessing an even more powerful form of corporate convergence with the coming together of the most powerful corporations from various sectors of activity such as content providers and infrastructure operators.

This concentration in the field of information and communication is occurring at an alarming rate at the risk of eroding competition and creating global monopolies. By 1995 the world's top 20 information and communications corporations had combined revenues of more than \$1 trillion – equivalent to the GDP of the United Kingdom. By 1998, the top 10 telecommunications corporations controlled more than 86% of a \$262 billion global market (UNDP, 1999). The findings of a *Variety* survey on the global film market in 1993 were

striking – in 1993, the total world gross (or total box office receipts) was \$8 billion. Of the 100 top-earning films, 88 were U.S. productions (Prince, 1997:256).

In a context marked by such dramatic disparities, the construction of broadband high-speed information networks have profound implications on the capacity of developing nations to produce and disseminate national and local cultural creations and content. Governments in all Asian countries have launched ambitious national information infrastructure initiatives and have begun rapid deregulation of both their broadcasting and telecommunications sectors. This will drastically increase the influx of foreign programs and content and national producers will be confronted with increased competition.

In the past, a number of strategies have been devised to protect and promote national and local culture in various parts of the world. Some countries have opted for quotas, which have restricted the inflow of foreign programming and content in broadcasting. Others have developed means to support and encourage the national cultural industries through subsidies, financial assistance and institutional development in training and education. Although these measures have had some effect on the development of national cultural industries, it can be said without any ambiguity that most countries have failed to weather the storm of cultural globalization and especially the American onslaught.

The global cultural landscape seems to have radically changed in the past decade or more. The days of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) are clearly over and currently there does not seem to be any way out of this cultural dynamic. National governments too seem to have surrendered to the dictates of the global market for cultural trade through a rapid liberalization of the media and the cultural industries. In this situation, the creation of national information infrastructure initiatives will constitute high capacity cultural conduits which will strengthen the emerging American digital and cultural empire.

#### **Malaysian Media Dynamics: Regulation and Control**

The Malaysian scenario is an interesting example of the functioning of media in Asia. With a total population of 21.7

million people, of which more than 17 million live in Peninsular Malaysia, the country was born with a complex ethnic and cultural environment. The ethnic composition of the population living in peninsular Malaysia is as follows: 10.6 million (57.9%) are Malays and other natives, 4.9 million (26.9%) are Chinese, and 1.3 million (7.6%) are Indians.

Malaysia became independent in 1957 and was faced with the difficult task of building a nation and to reconcile the various ethnic, linguistic and socio-cultural components, which constituted the country. As with other nations, which were faced with a similar task, Malaysia set out to create a national consciousness and culture. The media, especially broadcasting, which was extensively used by the British colonial rulers in Malaysia and in other countries for propaganda purposes, very soon became the key instruments for creating national and cultural unity.

The mass media became the ideal tools for the dissemination of information. The capacity to mobilize and gather all the disparate and diverse citizens was essential to create a sense of shared and common identity. The scarcity of resources as well as the need to use the mass media mainly for the purpose of development, brought about a State controlled media system in Malaysia since the very beginning of its existence as an independent nation. This has been a common trend in Third World countries where it was believed that the media had to be harnessed and used as instruments to promote "national development" and maintain national security (Kok Wah and Anuar, 1996).

The Malaysian media, especially broadcasting, were strongly regulated and controlled by the State with a clearly defined role as an instrument of national political and cultural development (Karthigesu, 1990). A major ethnic crisis in 1969 between the Malays and the Chinese only helped the government to justify its controls and put in place even more stringent regulations. These controls have led many critical thinkers to argue that the media were being used as ideological state apparatuses to promote the political and economic elite.

Malaysia has come a long way since its independence. It has witnessed a dramatic growth in the last few decades and has emerged as one of the most powerful Southeast Asian economies. For over eight years, the average annual growth

rate of the country has been hovering around the 10% mark. Real GDP per capita has grown from US\$1.110 in 1960 to US\$5.649 in 1990. The reasons for this economic success can be found in a series of major policy shifts and initiatives since 1971, which transformed the country. The *New Economic Policy* (Muzaffar, 1989) followed by the *Look East Policy* (Jomo, 1985), *Malaysia Incorporated* and the *Privatization Policy*, have led to rapid liberalization of the economy and brought about dynamic economic growth.

Since coming to power in 1981, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed and his Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition have held on to political power and implemented most of these far-reaching economic reforms. The BN clearly dominates the national political scene and garnered a two-thirds majority in Parliament in the 1999 elections. This political dominance and majority has helped the government to design and implement economic policy and reforms without much resistance from opposition parties.

As far as the media landscape in Malaysia goes, it has been profoundly marked by the Privatization Policy which was launched in the early 1980s. This policy initiative essentially led to the reduction of the role of the government and the public sector in the economic arena and the private sector was called to drive economic development by increasing competition, efficiency and productivity (Jomo, 1995). As a result of this major policy shift, the mass media, which were also controlled and operated by the State, were required to move towards privatization.

Privatization has profoundly transformed the communication sector in Malaysia. In 1983, the public service monopoly of broadcasting was ended with the creation of Malaysia's first private television network, TV3. Since then, the deregulation and liberalization of broadcasting has continued at a rapid pace and today there are not only several private terrestrial television channels such as NTV7 but also ASTRO, Malaysia's first satellite television service which offers an attractive bouquet of national and international channels.

However, and this is where the Malaysian media and communication landscape is unique, deregulation and liberalization did not really lead to a more independent media system. Nor has the government withdrawn from the media sector. Several developments need to be mentioned here in

order to provide a clear picture of the Malaysian media landscape. Although deregulation and liberalization has occurred in the Malaysian media, leading to increasing commercialization and competition within the system, there has been greater state intervention in the workings of the media.

This intervention and control by the government has been achieved by two mechanisms. Firstly, through a series of regulatory measures and policy initiatives, the Malaysian government has strengthened its grip on the media. Acts such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act of 1984, the Broadcasting Act of 1988, the Internal Security Act, the Sedition Act, the Defamation Act, the Official Secrets Act and others, restrict the functioning of the media and maintain the control exerted over the media by the government. The recent political crisis concerning the deposed Deputy-Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and the subsequent political conflict and dissent has highlighted the government's systematic use of these stringent regulations to prevent the opposition from using the media to disseminate their views and opinions.

The other important characteristic of the Malaysian media landscape is direct political party ownership of the mass media. All the major mass media in the country, whether it be the Press, or broadcasting, are owned and controlled by a few political parties, mainly the BN coalition members. In fact, the three main components of the ruling BN coalition, which are all ethnically based parties, each directly or indirectly control the main mass media which cater to these ethnic and linguistic groups through their investment and holding companies. UMNO (United Malays National Organization) controls the major Malay newspapers as well as the English language *New Straits Times* and TV3 through its investment arm and companies that are loyal to the party. MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association) controls Chinese newspapers as well as the English language daily *The Star*. Finally, the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) owns some of the leading Tamil language dailies and media in the country.

Through these two mechanisms – regulation and ownership, the Malaysian government has maintained a tight grip and control over the mainstream mass media in the country. The recent political crisis in the country has given rise to new voices of dissent and criticism that have slowly begun



to change the Malaysian media landscape. Opposition party magazines and leaflets as well as the advent of the Internet have provided these voices of dissent with a small media space to disseminate their views and ideology. Although the government has already reacted strongly against the opposition party media organs, the Internet has proved a useful tool to circumvent the government's control over the media. However, PC ownership is still very low access to the Internet is therefore very limited in the country (about 11% of the population have access to the Internet) and this has prevented the opposition from making a major impact on public opinion.

### **The Cultural Industries in Malaysia and the Problem of Content**

In Asia, the relationship between media and culture has always been problematic. In the first place, all media technology has been imported into Asia. Once media technologies are imported, they have to undergo a long and difficult period of adaptation and adjustment to fit into the social, cultural and political specificities of the Asian environment. Moreover, it has been extremely difficult to come to a consensus on the real role and place of media in society. Generally, the ruling elite as well as the government have used the media to further their own cause and moulded them to suit and protect their own interests.

The cultural scenario in Asia has also been riddled with complexities and contradictions. Emerging after a long period of colonial rule, sometimes even under several rulers, most Asian nations were constituted after their independence from their colonial masters between the 1940s to the 1960s. New political entities thus emerged but they were all a complex amalgamation and combination of different races, ethnic groups, languages, cultural entities, social formations and religious groups. The notion of "national culture" was vague and referred to an abstract reality, which emerged as a result of the creation of politically sovereign entities after their Independence from colonial governments. Diversity was at the very root of these nations and cultural conflicts and contradictions were inevitable.

The deregulation and liberalization of broadcasting in Malaysia have amplified the problem of content production and weakened the national cultural industries. Since the inception of broadcasting in the country, Malaysia has been an importer of foreign television programs. With deregulation and the entry of commercial television operators in the media landscape, there has been an increase in the importation of foreign programs and content. This has created a conflict between the official cultural policy designed to promote national culture and the realities of the new broadcasting market place.

The ethnic and cultural composition of Malaysia has also amplified the problems faced by the national cultural industries. The Malays, the Chinese as well as the Indians have generally opted for television programs and films in their own language and ethnic origin. In other words, while the Malay population has been the principal consumer of Malay film and television productions, the Chinese have turned to content originating from China and Hong Kong and the Indians have opted for the vast supply of films and TV programs originating from the Indian sub-continent. Then of course, there is a general appreciation and attraction towards films made in America.

This has segmented the Malaysian media audience and prevented the constitution of a unified cultural market or audience. Consequently, the cultural industries in Malaysia have struggled to find their audience. Statistics on the Malaysian media reveal the dire situation of the Malaysian cultural industries. As far as the film industry in Malaysia goes, there were 1514 films released in Malaysia in 1997 (including non-feature) of which 13 films were locally produced while 1501 films were foreign productions (Goonasekera and Holaday, Eds, 1998:).

In terms of the origin of imported films too the 1997 statistics reveal certain interesting facts. In 1997, a total of 582 feature films were imported into Malaysia of which 300 were American productions, 128 were produced in Hong Kong and 125 films were produced in India. As far as the television industry in Malaysia goes, between 70 to 80% of the television programs broadcast in Malaysia are of foreign origin, if all the channels are taken into consideration including the satellite channels. America is clearly the major source of import of

television programs accounting for approximately 60% of the foreign programs imported into Malaysia.

These figures reveal the weakness of the Malaysian cultural industries. They also explain why the Malaysian government has not been successful in promoting national cultural industries and creating a unified national cultural market. They however cannot be fully blamed for this state of affairs, most countries find themselves in a similar condition and the main reasons for this situation are perhaps the fundamental ethnic and cultural divisions within nations as well as the dynamics of the global cultural marketplace.

### **Information Technology and The Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia**

Malaysia has emerged as one of the leading players in the information technology sector in Asia. In spite of its weaknesses in the content production industry, there is no doubt that the country has taken giant strides in the development of information and communication infrastructure. Broadcasting and telecommunications have undergone a profound change and witnessed significant growth in the past decade.

Following the liberalization of the telecommunications sector in 1987, Telekom Malaysia took over the operation of the country's telecommunications network and infrastructure. At the end of the Second Malaysia Plan (1970 - 1975), there were 169,000 subscribers in the country. This figure increased to 1.58 million subscribers at the end of the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986 - 1990). The number of telephone for every 100 persons increased from 6,5 in 1985 to 12 in 1993. Recent projections indicate that this figure will jump to 30 telephone lines for every 100 persons by the year 2005 (National Telecommunications Policy, 1994 - 2000).

The Malaysian government has shown a strong commitment to information technology and believes that it will help the country to leapfrog from the industrial to the information age and thereby become a fully developed nation. In February 1991, after a decade in power, the Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, unveiled his ambitious vision and strategy to lead Malaysia's economic development into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Vision 2020* has today become a buzzword not only in

Malaysia but also in other parts of the world. This policy initiative is also the major thrust behind the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) information infrastructure initiative.

The Multimedia Super Corridor is certainly one of the world's most ambitious information infrastructure initiative. It has drawn international attention and some of the world's leading IT companies have already committed themselves to the MSC. This IT initiative, "Malaysia's gift to the world", has been billed by the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim as "...one of the global cradles of the new information age" (Ariff and Chuan, 1998:v).

The Multimedia Super Corridor, unlike most other information infrastructure initiatives around the world is geographically and spatially delimited. Situated in an area covering 750 square kilometres, the MSC stretches from the Kuala Lumpur City Center to the new Kuala Lumpur International airport in the south. Two cities are being constructed within this corridor - Cyberjaya and Putrajaya.

In order to provide cutting-edge technological infrastructure and to attract the world's leading IT companies, the MSC will offer a high capacity and fully digital telecommunications network. The MSC promises partner companies not only a host of interesting economic incentives but also one of the world's most sophisticated networks. The key features of this infrastructure and network are:

- 2,5 - 10 gigabit/second Fibre Optic Backbone network;
- High capacity Direct Fibre Links (to ASEAN nations, Japan, the U.S., and Europe);
- Open Standards, High-speed Switching and Multiple Protocols;
- Regional satellite communication services (provided by the Malaysian satellite system MEASAT);
- Wireless communication and other value-added services.

The Multimedia Development Corporation (MDC), which was created to supervise and manage the MSC project, describes the main objectives of the MSC as being the following:

- A vehicle for attracting world-class technology led companies to Malaysia and develop local IT industries;
- A multimedia utopia offering a productive, intelligent environment within which a multimedia value chain of goods and services will be produced and delivered across the globe;
- An island of excellence with multimedia specific capabilities, technologies, infrastructure, legislation, policies, and systems for competitive advantage;
- A test-bed for invention, research and other groundbreaking multimedia developments spearheaded by seven multimedia applications;
- A global community living on the edge of the information society;
- A world of smart homes, smart cities, smart schools, smart cards and smart partnerships.

To successfully launch the MSC, seven pilot flagship applications have been identified. These flagship applications are divided into two distinct categories:

- Multimedia Development Flagship Applications offering concrete business opportunities to facilitate the MSC's development - Electronic Government, Multipurpose Card, Smart Schools and Telemedicine;
- Multimedia Environment Flagship Applications providing an optimal environment that supports multimedia companies entering the MSC - Research and Development Clusters, Worldwide Manufacturing Webs and Borderless Marketing.

The MSC is essentially an IT hub which will provide cutting-edge infrastructure and an attractive environment for the leading national and international information technology firms. The MSC is the fruit of a strong political will and thrust and in spite of economic difficulties encountered in the wake of the financial crisis which the whole of South East Asia has recently undergone, there seems to be no slowing down on the construction of the MSC. There is no doubt that Malaysia has taken an early lead in the IT arena and is going to be an important player in the international scene. However, it is too

early to critically evaluate the MSC project because it is still under construction and has just begun its operations.

### **The Cultural Implications of IT and the MSC in Malaysia**

As has been discussed previously, the Malaysian cultural industries have not proved to be very dynamic or productive in the content sector. With the development of new media as well as sophisticated means of distribution and transmission, most countries' dependence on foreign programming and content has significantly increased.

In the Asian context, one can say without any hesitation that creating a national culture from a plethora of distinct cultural, linguistic and ethnic communities has been a very difficult proposition. In general, Asia has been characterized by lofty cultural aims and objectives but with limited means and resources. Even in terms of cultural policy, there has been a clear shift in priorities, which has accompanied the deregulation and liberalization of the mass media. The decline of public service media in Asia, as well as in other parts of the world, and the emergence of powerful and often transnational media conglomerates have marginalized cultural concerns in favour of commercial motives and objectives.

In Malaysia, there has been a significant and rapid increase in media channels and distribution systems without any accompanying increase in the production of content. In the first place, the internal cultural and ethnic diversity has been an important obstacle in producing unified cultural content for the whole nation. Secondly, the segmentation of the cultural landscape and the audience has curtailed the growth of Malaysian cultural industries, making them unable to withstand the onslaught from much more powerful and competitive content producers.

There has also been an inadequate effort to develop the national and local cultural industries in Asia. In Malaysia, as well as in most other parts of the developing world, there has been little serious and concerted effort to find ways to boost and strengthen the national and local cultural production industries. The quality of media content has been relatively weak, so much so that when commercial operators entered the fray in broadcasting, for example, the national audiences began abandoning the public service media.

Malaysia has launched one the world's most ambitious IT infrastructure initiatives, the MSC. The cultural implications of this initiative are going to be profound. In the first place, broadband high speed information infrastructure is going to dramatically increase the flow of cultural commodities across the globe. Digitization and convergence are going to create a wide range of cultural contents delivered through a network of networks to every home. Text, sound and images are already delivered through the Internet and with full convergence, high quality video will also be transmitted.

Malaysia is already dependent on America and other nations for programming and content. IT can only increase this dependence on foreign cultural content and further weaken the national cultural industries. Linguistically, although there are more and more languages being offered on the Internet, it is clear that English language will dominate the landscape and further strengthen its position in the world's media markets. This will also have an effect on Malaysian culture and restrict the development of national and especially local cultural productions.

The MSC does not have any real cultural agenda. The technological and economic objectives of the MSC project are clear but there is no real mention of the cultural production sector. Hardware seems to have become the focus of national governments and little thought is being given to content in the information age. There is a growing feeling that national governments are more and more preoccupied with economic development and in the process have adopted the position that the market should regulate cultural issues and content. Past experience also seems to have convinced policy and strategic decision-makers that it is impossible to fight countries like America in the content arena.

National audiences do not seem too unhappy with foreign content and programming either. There is an increasing belief that in the end the consumer should chose. I am of the opinion that first a reasonable choice should be provided to the consumer. If all that is offered is foreign content and at the same time the limited local and national content provided to them is uninteresting, then it can only lead to the importation of more and more foreign content.

Information technology, unlike what some people lead us to believe, has a tremendous potential to develop local cultural

initiatives. IT has already provided an unprecedented opportunity to minority groups, NGO's, and other organizations to communicate messages and ideas and develop networks around the world. There is no doubt that information technology, and in Malaysia's case the MSC, has the potential to contribute to the development of local cultural content. However, culture will have to first become a priority and will require a concerted effort and substantial assistance from the government and the concerned players if any of these initiatives are to succeed.

Indeed, it is not an easy task to counter American hegemony in the global trade in cultural commodities. However, as experience has proved all around the world, a total abdication to market forces has not helped local cultural industries in any way. In fact, it is this surrender to the market and global forces that has led to the decline of national cultural industries in the first place. At the least, the Malaysian government can provide a real space for cultural creation and production within the MSC to offset its excessive focus on infrastructure. It could also pressure foreign companies within the MSC to contribute either by way of finance or by way of direct production to promote national and local culture. Most of the top-notch multinational information and communication corporations are already MSC status companies. Creating a requirement that they invest or support local productions is definitely not a tall order given the significant incentives that they are being offered by Malaysia to participate in the MSC.

It is however not possible to rely only on the government for the promotion and development of national or local cultural production, especially given the heavy investments required and the logic of the marketplace. Governments can provide the framework, conducive conditions and material support, it will be however left to all the organizations and players in the cultural arena to contribute to the dynamic development of Malaysian cultural industries.

The MSC could become a boon or a bane for Malaysian culture and its various facets. For true cultural interaction and exchange, it is imperative to have a range of cultural winds to blow across the world and blend with each other. It would be a pity if only a few winds blew across the earth and if cultural diversity were to be blown away. Then IT would be nothing but one more tool for corporate concentration and convergence and the spread of global digital capitalism.



Indrajit Banerjee (Ph.D Sorbonne) is Assoc. Prof. at <sup>the</sup> School of Communication, National University of Technology, Singapore.

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Author

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